

Folks I Have Known
Personally and otherwise, by
James M. Woodman [written sometime after 1941]

George Rockenbach

Along the old Northwest Trail, which later became known as Milwaukee Ave., many of Lake county's early settlers traveled, after having arrived overland at the primitive unattractive village of Chicago. Among those who made the trip in April 1841, at the age of two months, was the subject of this brief outline of a very active and useful life - George Rockenbach.

He was born in Gerstheim, Alsace Lorraine, France, Feb. 2, 1841, the son of George and Salome (Reidlinger) Rockenbach and was the third to bear the family name. Soon after his birth, his parents started for America, the journey ending some two months later, as stated above.

The courageous pioneer family settled on a farm in Vernon township, a short distance south of Half Day. There George Rockenbach grew to manhood, gaining the limited education available in those days, in the Tripp district school. That knowledge, coupled with sterling lessons taught within his home, developed a character that became a positive force for good throughout the long years that followed.

On Sept. 3, 1864, George Rockenbach and Miss Sarah Ott, daughter of Lorenz Ott, were married at the home of the bride's sister, at Kankakee, Il. They continued to live on the Ott farm, two miles west of the village of Deerfield, and became the parents of eight children, of which the following six are still living: Ella C. Plagge, Samuel, Viola and Irene, of Deerfield; Almon of Crystal Lake, Il., and Preston of Los Angeles, Calif.

In October, 1898, the family moved to the village of Deerfield and established a home. Mrs. Rockenbach lived less than one year after the change in place of residence had been made, passing away on Aug. 18, 1899.

George Rockenbach, despite the many personal duties that confronted him at all times, never shirked his public responsibilities. He was active in the affairs of the Northfield Township Mutual Fire Insurance Co. He served the organization as director for 23 years and during the last 16 years of his lifetime, occupied the position of president. He was one of the organizers of the Deerfield State Bank and for 15 years was a member of the board of directors. As one of the first trustees of the Deerfield-Shields Township High School, he rendered valuable service.

He was an ardent Republican, having cast his first vote for Abraham Lincoln, for President. He never sought political office, but for many years he was chosen by his townsmen to serve as highway commissioner and later as township supervisor. After filling the latter position for two terms, he retired from active service for the party of which he had so long been a most valuable member.

The advice of George Rockenbach was often asked for by those who desired unbiased and honest information relative to property values in southern Lake county. Those interested in matters of early history of the county, found him a ready source of information. He retained a most remarkable memory and could relate many tales of the privations of the pioneers and their experiences with the Indians that were numerous in the territory where he spent his boyhood.

One of the thrilling stories that remained vivid in his mind was the Chicago fire in 1871. He had taken a load of grain from his father's farm to Chicago and after disposing of it, used his team and wagon to help move household goods of those whose houses were destroyed. At the age of 76 he learned to drive an automobile and continued to do so until shortly before the time of his death, May 16, 1936, at the age of 95 years and three months. He was an admirable, refreshing, and inspiring character.